

Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
TRSE-00 OMB-01 /066 R

DRAFTED BY NEA/P:REUNDELAND:DCS
APPROVED BY NEA/P:GFSHERMAN
-----028545 190500Z /13
P 182228Z MAY 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SOPN, MASS
SUBJECT: EDITORIALS ON AIRCRAFT SALES

1. WE WANT TO BE SURE THAT THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT IS
AWARE OF ONE OF THE PROMINENT THEMES IN U.S. EDITORIALS
FOLLOWING THE SENATE VOTE ON THE AIRCRAFT SALES, PARTICULARLY THAT IT IS NOW UP TO THE PRESIDENT TO DEMONSTRATE
THE CREDIBILITY OF THE POINT THAT THE SALES WOULD ADVANCE
THE PEACE PROCESS. IN A LOW-KEY WAY PLEASE PASS ON TO
MUBARAK AND KAMEL THE TEXT OF THESE EDITORIALS FROM THE
MAY 17 WASHINGTON POST AND NEW YORK TIMES, WHICH FOLLOW:

2. "WHAT THE PLANES BUY (NYT)

IN REFUSING TO BLOCK PRESIDENT CARTER'S PACKAGE OF JET
FIGHTER SALES TO ISRAEL, EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA, THE
SENATE HAS IN EFFECT RATIFIED THE CONTENTIONS OF RICHARD
NIXON, GERALD FORD AND NOW JIMMY CARTER THAT THE UNITED
STATES CAN UPHOLD ITS COMMITMENT TO ISRAEL AND AT THE SAME
TIME ENTER INTO PARTNERSHIP WITH ITS MODERATE ARAB NEIGH-
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BORS. THAT PARTNERSHIP EXTENDS EVEN TO BECOMING, IN THE
CASE OF THE SAUDIS, A MAIN SUPPLIER OF MODERN WEAPONS --
INTERCEPTOR AIRCRAFT AS SOPHISTICATED AS ANY IN AMERICA'S
OWN AIR FORCE. IT IS A SIGN OF JUST HOW FAR THE MIDDLE
EAST DEBATE IN THIS COUNTRY HAS CHANGED THAT VIRTUALLY
ALL THE SENATE'S ATTENTION WAS FOCUSED ON THE 60 F-15'S

PROMISED TO THE SAUDIS; THE SALE OF 50 LESS CAPABLE BUT NONETHELESS POTENT F-5E'S FOR EGYPT SAILED THROUGH WITHOUT A MUTTER.

IN SHORT, THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY HAS NOW WON POLITICAL RATIFICATION FOR A LONG-EVOLVING AND COMPLEX MIDDLE EAST POLICY THAT AIMS TO PROMOTE THE SECURITY AND ECONOMIC INTERESTS OF BOTH THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL. PRESIDENT CARTER WANTED TO SELL THE FIGHTER PLANES TO GAIN VITAL CREDIBILITY IN RIYADH AND CAIRO. AND HE WANTS TO USE THE INFLUENCE AND LEVERAGE THUS GAINED TO KEEP PRESSING THE ARAB STATES TO GIVE ISRAEL THE RECOGNITION AND SECURITY GUARANTEES IT NEEDS TO WITHDRAW FROM OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORY.

INEVITABLY, THE ADMINISTRATION'S GROWING CLOSENESS TO EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA WILL MAKE THE ISRAELIS FEEL LESS CERTAIN OF THEIR WASHINGTON CONNECTION. WHETHER IT WILL MAKE THEM EVEN MORE RELUCTANT TO YIELD TERRITORY FOR PEACE IS AN IMPONDERABLE, BUT ONE WITH WHICH THE ADMINISTRATION MUST NOW RECKON.

THE PLANES WILL NOT BUY ANY INSTANT MAJOR CONCESSIONS FROM EITHER THE EGYPTIANS OR THE SAUDIS. THE RISKS WERE ALL IN THE OTHER DIRECTION: THE SENATE REJECTION OF THE DEAL WOULD HAVE LED PRESIDENT SADAT AND PRINCE FAHD TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ASSUME THAT, PRESIDENT CARTER'S WORD TO THE CONTRARY, THE UNITED STATES COULD NOT BE RELIED UPON, AND THAT THEY MUST HEDGE THEIR POLICIES ACCORDINGLY. IF THE SENATE ACTION BUYS ANYTHING IMMEDIATE, IT MAY BE MORE TIME AND A GREATER WILLINGNESS ON THE PART OF THE EGYPTIANS AND THE SAUDIS TO EXPLORE THE PLAN FOR THE WEST BANK THAT ISRAELIS PUT FORWARD IN JANUARY. BUT IT IS EQUALLY INCUMBENT ON ISRAEL TO PREPARE TO MODIFY THE PLAN IN WAYS THE MODERATE ARAB LEADERS FEEL IS ESSENTIAL -- TOWARD GREATER PARTICIPATION OF THE WEST BANK'S PALESTINIANS IN DETERMINING THEIR OWN POLITICAL FUTURE.

SOME CRITICS CHARGE THAT THE ADMINISTRATION HAS SOLD OUT ISRAEL FOR OIL. THEY ARE WRONG. THE SAUDIS ARE CRUCIAL IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACEMAKING PROCESS. THEIR OIL MAKES THEM THE MAJOR SOURCE OF FUNDS FOR OTHER ARAB GOVERNMENTS TO USE EITHER TO MAKE WAR OR TO MEET VITAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS -- AS RIYADH PERMITS.

NEITHER THE ARABS NOR THE ISRAELIS -- NOR, INDEED, ISRAEL'S AMERICAN SUPPORTERS -- SHOULD MISREAD THE SENATE'S ACTION OR THE ADMINISTRATION'S POLICIES. IN AGREEING TO

MEET SOME EGYPTIAN AND SAUDI ARABIAN REQUESTS TO PURCHASE

ARMS, THE UNITED STATES DOES NOT WEAKEN ITS LONG-STANDING COMMITMENT TO ISRAEL'S CAPACITY TO DEFEND ITSELF. NOR DO THE SALES MEAN THAT WASHINGTON WOULD -- OR COULD -- NOW PRESSURE THE ISRAELIS INTO MAKING CONCESSIONS THAT THEY THINK WOULD LEAVE THEM DANGEROUSLY EXPOSED.

WHAT THE PLANE PACKAGE DOES BUY IS THE DIPLOMATIC LEVERAGE THAT PRESIDENT CARTER SAYS HE NEEDS. THE TEST WILL BE HOW HE USES IT."

3. "LET THE MIDEAST PEACE TALKS RESUME (WP)

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SENATE APPROVAL OF THE PRESIDENT'S MIDEAST WARPLANE PACKAGE REFLECTS MUCH MORE THAN THE GATHERING WEIGHT OF ARAB OIL AND MONEY. AT LEAST SINCE 1973 SUCCESSIVE ADMINISTRATIONS HAVE FELT THAT THE BEST WAY TO END THE REGION'S DEADLY CYCLE OF WAR AND TO LAUNCH A PROCESS LEADING TOWARD PEACE IS FOR THE UNITED STATES TO MAKE ITSELF EQUALLY USEFUL AND TRUSTED ON BOTH SIDES. IT IS THAT EFFORT THAT THE SENATE HAS NOW ENDORSED. TO SEE IT AS ABANDONMENT OF ISRAEL OR APPEASEMENT OF THE ARABS, AS SOME PARTISANS OF BOTH DO, MISSES THE POINT. ISRAEL HAS LOST ITS "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP" WITH THE UNITED STATES, IF BY THAT IS MEANT THE ISRAELI REGIONAL MONOPOLY ON ACCESS TO MODERN AMERICAN ARMS. BUT IT HAS NOT LOST ITS CLAIM ON SPECIAL AMERICAN CONCERN FOR ITS SECURITY AND WELFARE. AS DID ITS IMMEDIATE PREDECESSORS, THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION BELIEVES THE UNITED STATES CAN BEST HONOR THAT OBLIGATION BY REINFORCING THE MORE MODERATE STATES AND TENDENCIES IN THE ARAB WORLD, EVEN AS IT CONTINUES TO UPHOLD ISRAEL. WE AGREE.

AS MUCH AS THE ADMINISTRATION TRIES TO EXPRESS FRIENDSHIP FOR ISRAELIS AND ARABS IN TERMS THAT ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE, MANY PEOPLE, OF DIFFERENT PERSUASIONS, PERSIST IN THINKING -- OR HOPING -- THAT A CHOICE MUST BE MADE. THAT IS THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THE SENATE VOTE IS SEEN AS A DEFEAT FOR ISRAEL. WE WOULD ARGUE THAT IN A REAL AND LONG-TERM SENSE THE UNITED STATES REMAINS DEEPLY COMMITTED TO ISRAELI SECURITY, AS BRUISED AND FEARFUL AS MANY ISRAELIS CURRENTLY FEEL. THE RESULT IS SURELY, HOWEVER, A COSTLY DEFEAT FOR THE ISRAEL LOBBY AS A POLITICAL FORCE IN CONGRESS -- A DEFEAT DESERVING TO BE READ AS EVIDENCE THAT, POPULAR MYTH AND ARAB APPREHENSION NOTWITHSTANDING, THERE ARE DEFINITE LIMITS TO THE POLITICAL POWER THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AMERICAN ELEMENTS PARTIAL TO ISRAEL CAN BRING TO BEAR. THE LOBBY HAS NOT BEEN BROKEN. BUT THE SENATE HAS CONFIRMED THE DISPOSITION OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH TO LOOK AT

MIDEAST QUESTIONS FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THEIR OVERALL EFFECTS.

THE NOTION IS NOW CIRCULATING THAT THE UNITED STATES SHOULD TAKE A QUICK AND DEMONSTRATIVE STEP TO BOLSTER ISRAEL -- TO EASE ITS GENERAL DISCOMFITURE AND GIVE ITS MODERATES SOMETHING THEY CAN USE TO SHOW ISRAELI SKEPTICS THAT THE AMERICAN CONNECTION IS STILL WORKING. SOME AMERICAN LEGISLATORS ARE ALREADY TALKING OF PROVIDING ISRAEL, SAY, 75 MORE F16S. IT MIGHT WELL BE A GOOD IDEA TO WORK MORE CLOSELY WITH ISRAEL ON ITS LONG-TERM SECURITY REQUIREMENTS -- THOUGH HARDLY IN CATEGORIES SO POLITICALLY VOLATILE AS WARPLANES. BUT WHAT IS SURELY A BETTER IDEA IS TO RENEW ATTENTION TO THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS, WHICH HAS BEEN LANGUISHING SINCE EGYPT QUIT THE TABLE FOUR MONTHS AGO.

TWO CONSIDERATIONS ARE RELEVANT. THE FIRST IS THAT, AFTER THE PLANE FIGHT, PRESIDENT CARTER IS IN A STRONG POSITION TO ASK EGYPT TO RETURN TO THE TABLE AND START NEGOTIATING ON THE ONLY PROPOSALS -- ISRAEL'S -- ON THE TABLE. IF PRESIDENT SADAT PULLED OUT OF THE TALKS IN JANUARY TO INDUCE THE UNITED STATES TO APPLY MORE PRESSURE ON ISRAEL, THEN HE ENTIRELY SUCCEEDED. MR. CARTER WENT HEAD-TO-HEAD WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN IN MARCH, AND GOT THE PLANES FOR EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA IN MAY. EGYPT SHOULD RESUME NEGOTIATIONS.

THE SECOND NEW ELEMENT IS THAT MR. BEGIN AND MR. DAYAN, IN THEIR MOST RECENT WASHINGTON VISITS, RESPONDED TO AMERICAN URGING AND UNDERTOOK TO START DISCUSSING ISRAEL'S PROPOSALS IN A FORM -- EMPHASIZING ARRANGEMENTS ON THE GROUND RATHER THAN ABSOLUTE PRINCIPLES -- THAT

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EGYPT MIGHT FIND MORE NEGOTIABLE. ONE DOES NOT HAVE TO THINK THERE IS MAGIC IN THE NEW FORM TO BELIEVE THAT IT IS VASTLY BETTER FOR ISRAELIS AND EGYPTIANS TO ENGAGE QUIETLY IN DETAILED TALKS ACROSS A TABLE THAN TO CONTINUE THE STERILE ROUTINE OF RHETORICAL CONFRONTATION AT A DISTANCE.

THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION, HAVING ARGUED FOR THE WARPLANE
PROPOSAL ON GROUNDS THAT IT WOULD FACILITATE THE SEARCH
FOR PEACE, HAS AN ESPECIALLY HEAVY RESPONSIBILITY TO
DEMONSTRATE, WITH ITS NEW ARAB PARTNERS AS WITH ITS OLD
ISRAELI FRIEND, THAT THAT IS SO." VANCE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FIGHTER AIRCRAFT, PRESS COMMENTS, MILITARY SALES, PEACE PLANS, NEGOTIATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE127285
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: REUNDELAND:DCS
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780210-0639
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780543/aaaabkdj.tel
Line Count: 229
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 0a81169b-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2646419
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EDITORIALS ON AIRCRAFT SALES
TAGS: SOPN, MASS, US, EG, XF
To: CAIRO
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/0a81169b-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014